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Disappearances From Bonn Fuel Spy-Case Fears

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BONN, Aug. 22 — A major spy scandal has begun unfolding in West Germany.

It appeared to spread today when a senior official of West Germany's counterintelligence agency was reported missing. He was the third Government employee to disappear in the last three weeks. In addition, a secretary for a lobbying group who was a close friend of one of the Government workers has also disappeared.

Officials said that Heinz Tiegde, who headed the agency's counterespionage effort aimed at East Germany, had not appeared at work since calling in sick on Monday.

Cases Not Officially Linked

The Cologne-based agency, which is formally known as the Federal Office for the Defense of the Constitution, declined in a statement to connect Mr. Tiegde's disappearance to that of the other three, who are believed to have been East German spies.

But Government sources acknowledged privately that West Germany might be facing the gravest espionage scandal since 1974, when Chancellor Willy Brandt was forced to resign after a top aide, Günter Guillaume, was uncovered as an East German agent.

The agency's statement said that Mr. Tiegde, a diabetic, was in "unsteady health." Others described the agent, who was said to have been involved in unmasking Mr. Guillaume, as depressed since the recent death of his wife.

On Monday, the statement added, colleagues tried to reach Mr. Tiegde on a business matter, but did not find him at home. Members of his family also did not know his whereabouts, it added.

The slowly unfolding scandal began

with the disappearance of Sonja Lüneburg, a longstanding private secretary to Martin Bangemann, who is Economics Minister and chairman of the Free Democratic Party, the junior coalition partner in Bonn.

The 60-year-old woman was said to have been on a vacation in Belgium and the Netherlands, and Mr. Bangemann initially thought she might have suffered an accident. But investigations revealed that Miss Lüneburg, who had become a close friend of the Bangemann family during her 12 years with the politician, had two decades ago assumed the identity of another German woman who had once lived in France.

Last Friday, Ursula Richter, a 52-year-old bookkeeper for the Association of Expellees, an organization close to the governing Christian Democratic Party, similarly vanished. She, too, was revealed to have come to West Germany from abroad some 20 years ago, apparently after switching identities with a woman who had defected to East Germany.

Investigators say they believe that both women are now in East Germany. Miss Richter, who is suspected of being the controller of a ring of spies, was said to have been episodically shadowed by West German agents before she disappeared.

The Bonn-based lobbying organization where she was employed is composed of former refugees from eastern Germany and territories lost in World War II, and it is regularly denounced as "revanchist" by East Germany and other Communist-ruled East European countries.

The suspicion that Miss Richter was a central figure in the spy network was strengthened with the revelation that a close friend, Lorenz Betzing, a 53-year-old employee of the administration office of the West German Army, had also vanished.

Involvement in Secret Work

The man had previously worked for a company that installed air-conditioning and ventilation ducts at a top-secret bunker complex in the Eifel hills outside Bonn that is supposed to serve as a command center in wartime. In his latest job, he may have had access to the personnel files of senior officers of the West German armed forces.

In a television interview this evening, Chancellor Helmut Kohl today promised more stringent security checks and warned that East Germany's espionage effort had strained relations between the two Germans.

"When spying and eavesdropping are going on in our ministries, in our political parties, in business organizations and unions, indeed, everywhere where relatively important decisions are made, this inevitably creates mistrust," he declared, interviewed at an Austrian vacation center, St. Gilgen.

"And this shows — there's no reason to beat around the bush — that assurances of good neighborly relations and reality are often far apart," he continued. "We really have to look at the difference between propaganda and the real situation."

Long-Term Effort

Mr. Kohl defended his Government by noting the patient investment of time and resources the East Germans had made. "If someone plans 30 years ahead, provides agents with a completely new identity, infiltrates them into the Federal Republic through foreign countries and builds up his network, he has naturally got good chances of putting his people into place," he said.

The evident East German infiltration technique exploited the fact that West Germans arriving from abroad do not have to present legal proof of their last residence — in contrast to the systematic police registration of West Germans who move within the country.

West German counterintelligence agents were said to be running checks on secretaries and other functionaries who lived abroad or immigrated from East Germany — a process that might prompt other hidden agents, or "moles" in the vernacular of espionage, to flee.

The checking promised to be an enormous task in a nation addicted to world travel, and one that gets a steady flow of immigrants from East Germany. Some 40,000 legally left East Germany last year.

Bonn politicians were disinclined to play down the access that secretaries have to state secrets. "A secretary knows a lot, even if she is just sitting next to someone," commented Gerhard Jahn, a Social Democratic legislator and former Justice Minister. "One has to be fair — this could happen to any one of us."